

Who Are You?

One day, the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" ~ ACTS 19:15 (NIV)

I find it intriguing throughout Scripture that the demons know who Jesus is, and yet the religious leaders of the day did not. The difference in the way that each group responds to Jesus is striking. The two demon-possessed men acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God, noting punishment at an appointed time, and asking Jesus for permission to enter the pigs (Matthew 8:28-32). However, repeatedly, the religious leaders were not able to recognize or accept Jesus.

The religious leaders were taught early on how they were to live, worship God, and treat others, and they were to teach this to the people. They were able to hear the words of Jesus as well as hear about the miracles He had performed. One would expect their behavior to reflect this. Yet it seems as if their behavior reflected what one would expect from the demons. I do not mean to suggest that the evil spirits behave in a satisfactory manner, but they approached Jesus with a modicum of respect.

One example that struck me is found in Acts 19:13-20. Some Jews were driving evil spirits out of the demon possessed in the name of Jesus. One day the spirit in one of the men answered them, declaring it knew Jesus and heard about Paul but wanted to know who they were. The man with the spirit then attacked them so severely that they all ran. This became known among the people who were then seized with such fear that they held the Lord in high honor. It also caused many of the believers to come and openly confess their sin. I am not sure the evil spirit caused the change in behavior, but were the religious leaders capable of bringing about such change?

Today's world offers easing or outright rejection of any sort of morality. There are conflicting opinions on so many relational issues, it creates a culture where there are no boundaries. It is difficult at times to hold fast to a solid stability of faith and God's way of living. We need to always seek God's way and understand what we believe and stand for, so we know how to respond if anyone asks who we are.

Dear Lord, help us seek your wisdom and stand firm in our faith. In Jesus' name, amen.

LACY HAYNICZ
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

When Loss Is Gain

Be like the Son of Man. He did not come to be served. Instead, he came to serve others. He came to give his life as the price for setting many people free.

~ MATTHEW 20:28 (NIRV)

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ~ MATTHEW 16:25 (NIV)

God's way of thinking is diametrically opposed to the world's way of thinking. The world thinks that in order to achieve greatness, one must push and drive and promote oneself, using whatever means will get the job done. So people lie, cheat, flatter, and seduce in order to get to the top.

But Jesus tells us something startling: If you want to be great, you must be a servant.

A *servant*? The term conjures up images of servitude, of humiliation, of denying one's own selfish desires. Our human nature recoils at the thought.

And yet it is this very concept of servanthood and practicing it in our lives that will not only make us great but will also fill us with joy. The key, however, is that our desire for greatness must not be an end in itself, but a means of exalting the greatness of Christ.

In God's way of thinking, to be great is to fulfill the calling of love for which we were created. To serve is to discover who we really are, for when we lose ourselves in serving others, we discover ourselves in that very loss (Matthew 16:25).

Lord, you are good and you are great. In everything we do, may we serve others and show your love to the world.

MARYANN DIORIO
CHURCH OF THE RISEN KING

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Let us...

But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

~ 1 Thessalonians 5:8

Bulk Trash Pickup

So get rid of all that is wrong in your life, both inside and outside, and humbly be glad for the wonderful message we have received, for it is able to save our souls as it takes hold of our hearts. ~ JAMES 1:21 (TLB)

We have been cleaning out a relative's house for weeks. We fill the trash and recycling cans each week, both at that house as well as our house, and even use our neighbors' cans for more. Twice we have called to arrange a "bulk trash pickup," where we can put out as much as we want. This pickup can contain trash bags as well as almost anything else, like mattresses, appliances, furniture, whatever. Regular trash collection is an automatic weekly pickup, but bulk pickup means you make an extra, intentional phone call by 10 a.m. on Monday to make it happen.

Cleaning out the trash in our own lives each week is important. We can try to accomplish this while attending church each week (in-person, online, or TV), by connecting with God in prayer, or even by discussing with others our concerns about our faith. Daily cleaning (prayer, Bible reading) is also important.

But a bulk pickup might also be necessary once in a while, as so many of our little transgressions build up and need to be hauled to the curb. These transgressions include our sinful thoughts, our actions, and words that have become habits and deeper problems. They pile up, and we need a bulk pickup, not just a regular, one-receptacle pickup!

Just like we need to schedule a bulk pickup, we need to schedule intentional time to deepen our relationship with Christ. That might mean attending a retreat, joining a new Bible study, committing to a new prayer plan, finding a spiritual mentor, spending time in solitude, or something else. If we're not making that call for pickup — putting that time on our calendar — the trash will become overwhelming, and our relationship with God will suffer.

How can you schedule a bulk pickup during this season of Lent?

CLAUDIA CUDDY

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



When life gives you lemons, add an orange and make orangeade!

MAY CUNNINGHAM

Happy 96th birthday, Mom!

Jesus Calls Us His Friend

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ~ JOHN 15:15 (NIV)

I attended a 50th high school reunion a few years back. It felt like I was returning to school after a long summer vacation, happy to see all of my old friends again. For most, I was seeing them for the first time since graduation. And for some, our lost relationships were rekindled.

Thanks to social media like Facebook, many of us have maintained contact since the reunion. I now communicate with some on an almost-daily basis and perhaps have come to know them better than I did in high school. I've become familiar with their spouses, children, and grandchildren. By posting family pictures, we're able to share in the celebrations of each other's life events like weddings and birthdays. And we're also able to offer comfort and support when one finds themselves confronted with difficult and trying situations like health concerns and the death of loved ones.

It's interesting to look back and see how a closeness has developed with some after decades of no contact. And though we may be separated by a thousand miles, our friendships continue to mature into something that could never have been in school. I now know that I can rely on these established relationships whenever needed.

The appreciation of these friendships caused me to turn my thoughts to the friend we have in Jesus. How blessed we are as believers to know that the Son of God wants a friendship with each of us. And His friendship is like no other we can know. During the last supper, Jesus told His disciples, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." Little did the disciples know that within hours He would do just that — not only for each of them, but for everyone in the world who believes in Him. O, what a friend we have in Jesus.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus, our Savior, who has shown us what a true friend He is to us. Help us to be that kind of friend to all we meet. In Jesus' name, amen.

LEE DUFFIELD
LAKEWOOD CHAPEL

Will People Be Glad to See Us?

May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word. ~ PSALM 119:74 (NIV)

In a recent publication that came to my home, this verse was included in an article that had the following literal translation: “They will see me and be glad.” Hopeful people can help others be glad. People can see hope in us. And, of course, the psalmist wants us to remember that our hope comes from the Word of God. Will people be glad to see us?

Periodically on the Ranch Hope radio broadcast, I give an award to someone. We call it the Barnabas Award. Barnabas was the encourager to the apostles and early Christians. He was born with the name Joseph, but because of his gift to encourage others, the Christian community nicknamed him Barnabas, Son of Encouragement. It was almost like calling him a cheerleader. Every family, every church, every ministry, every community needs a Barnabas. Maybe that could be your gift.

It is always interesting to listen to people and learn about their approach to life. I have said to someone, “My, it’s a beautiful day,” and their response was, “Yeah, but it’s supposed to rain tomorrow.” OK, try again, Bailey. “You are really looking good.” “I know, Dave, but I feel lousy inside.” OK, try again, Bailey. “You have the greatest kids.” “You think so, Dave? You ought to live with them.” OK. Not much hope in that conversation, so it is my job to turn those negatives into positives.

Sunshine or rain, we have hope; feeling good or bad, we have hope; good kids or troubled kids, we have hope; and only because our life is centered on God’s Word. Don’t miss that important point. The foundation of our hope comes from the Word. We have “hope in the Word.” The psalmist wrote, long before Barnabas knew, that hope is based on the Word. We can surmise that Barnabas was into the Word (the Jewish Scriptures, not the gospel of Jesus). He was probably raised by godly parents who taught him the Law and the prophets. As we follow the story of Barnabas in the New Testament, we find that he did not have an easy life. At one time there was even a conflict with Paul. What makes his life so hopeful is that he continued to be an encourager.

At a time when there is so much emphasis on being *physically* attractive, it should be our goal to be *spiritually* attractive. We want people to be glad when they see us and glad to be with us.

Lord, help me put my hope in your Word and bring encouragement to others.

REV. DAVE BAILEY, SR.
FOUNDER, RANCH HOPE

Reprinted from *The Book of Hope* by Dave Bailey © 2013.

Strength in Weakness

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." ~ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9A (NKJV)

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
~ PSALM 46:1 (NKJV)*

It will be 28 years ago this June that I lay in a hospital bed in Hahnemann Hospital in Philadelphia following open heart surgery for a narrowed mitral valve. I knew church friends and family had set up a prayer vigil for me.

As I drifted in and out of consciousness, I heard a rhythmic beeping sound to which my mind fitted these words: "The-Lord-is-my-strength ... The-Lord-is-my-strength ... The-Lord-is-my-strength." These words kept repeating in my mind as I listened to the beeping sound.

The Bible verse "My strength is made perfect in weakness" came to mind. At that moment I understood that because I had no strength of my own at that time, I would have to let God be my strength.

Later, after the anesthesia wore off, I realized that the beeping rhythm I'd heard was my own heartbeat on a cardiac monitor.

God had been and today still is my strength. I now know God answered the prayers of friends and family by bringing those thoughts to my mind, and I am deeply grateful to all who prayed for me.

Lord, let us remember when we are in trouble to turn to you for help. You are always there to help us.

PAT RACEY THOMPSON
EVANGELICAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

This was reprinted from a 1998 Lenten devotional book. That means it has been 52 years since Pat's open heart surgery, and she is still going strong.



Let us...

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name.

~ Hebrews 13:15

Are You Vaccinated Against Thee Virus?

Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

~ JOHN 1:29B (NKJV)

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

~ LUKE 5:20 (NIV)

When you hear the word *virus* you kind of shiver and make a face. But face the facts, viruses are here to stay, and we have to live with them.

I want to talk about *thee virus*, the worst kind. The kind that affects all of mankind and spreads like wildfire. It's called sin! The whole world is affected by this virus. It didn't start in a lab or a wet market but in a garden long ago when a couple decided to disobey their Creator, the Lord God, and eat the forbidden fruit.

Hundreds of millions have lost more than their lives. And families have been split apart because of it.

But there is a cure. Yes, finally the cure came through a manger in Bethlehem. But some people said "Bah! That's no cure, that's too simple to be a cure."

Some tried to ignore it and said a cure doesn't exist. Some tried to change the remedy, even made laws against it. Some murdered to stop the cure. They even screamed at it to drown it out. Finally they nailed that cure to a tree* and said, "We'll find our own cure." But they never could.

But the cure never went away or died out. That cure for the sin virus is still going strong, able to wipe out and cure the most horrible sins known to man.

At times, this sin virus has tried to attack me once again, but I am fully vaccinated by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. This sin virus is defeated forever! *The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin* (1 John 1:7 NKJV).

Father, thank you that my sins were like scarlet, but now they are as white as snow. In Jesus' name, amen.

AL ZAPPOLA

LIVING HOPE WORSHIP CENTER

*Words paraphrased from Paragon and Gaither, 1993